4: Flannery & Cooper E-5 (1939-1945) 1946
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

only his property and so have to begin accumulating again from scratch, but might at the same time lose as well his standing in the tribe and become a defeated and disgraced nobody, of a low standing from which it was very difficult to rise in the scale.

The wheel game was not played by women or children, nor apparently by the very young men, but only by fully adult or middle-aged men and older ones, and by only two players at a time. The really big games with large stakes were in most cases, it seems—almost all, according to our informants—played by two "enemy friends" or "war friends." Such enemy friends or war friends were very different from ordinary friends or "true" pledged friends. An "enemy friendship" was a war-related compact entered into in the following manner. A member of a returning war party would give some trophy or booty he had taken from the enemy—e.g., a scalp, or horse, or weapon—to one of his own compatriots of the same or opposite sex, who had little choice but to accept. Acceptance made "enemy friends" or "war friends" of the two. War friends, particularly if unrelated and both males, could go the limit in twitting and insulting each other and in playing practical jokes, even rather outrageous ones, on each other, and the victim had to take such behavior in good part, at least externally. However, along with the privilege of taking such liberties ran the accepted obligation to stand by each other in real need or hazard of grave nature.

The two war friends could gamble with each other. In fact, gambling among the Gros Ventre reached at times its climax in contests between two war friends. A wheel game between war friends commonly arose out of a "bragging match" between them; one would challenge the other to play the wheel game. If the one challenged declined to accept the challenge, his war friend who challenged him, and his other war friends, would ever after take occasion to deride him publicly for it at the least provocation. So the challenge could not easily be declined. The game often became one in which each enemy friend would go out to strip the other of practically everything he owned—horses, gun, blankets, lodge—and at which the most eager interest was aroused among the relatives, fellow-clansmen, and friends of the respective players and, for that matter, among the whole camp population. Such enemy-friend contests were commonly protracted sessions, often all-day ones, at the wheel game.

The following three narratives of particular wheel-game gambling contests—the first two of which are matters of well-remembered recent history, the third an older traditional story paralleled elsewhere on the Plains—throw some further light on the social role of the Gros Ventre wheel game.

621 Members of one band could and not infrequently did gamble both for small
525 and for big stakes against members of other bands, just as one kinship group used to gamble against others. Tribal we-feeling certainly existed, but seemingly not as intense as band we-feeling, just as, in turn, the latter was not as intense as kin we-feeling. / In inter-band, as in inter-kin, gambling, spectators, if they bet at all, would lay their wagers on the players of their own band, as required by band loyalty, regardless of the relative skill and reputation of the contesting players or teams.

575 For Gros Ventre men who had reached full adulthood and were still in the
[885] prime of life, there were two age-societies, called the Stars and the Wolves (or
525 Wolf-men). These two groups, with soldier-police functions, would join forces when necessary in keeping order, in fighting fires, and in defending the whole tribe against enemies, but for the rest rivalry between them was pretty keen. Stars would gamble against Wolves in big games for large stakes, but ordinarily a Star would not gamble against a Star or a Wolf against a Wolf, except for refreshments or a smoke or similar trifling "stakes." Inasmuch as membership in the two societies cut across the lines of kinship and band membership, inter-society gambling suffered an important restriction: if a Star were gambling in a given game, his relatives among the Wolves would not play or bet against him in that particular game. Kinship ties took precedence over society ties.

525 Gros Ventre would of course gamble for big stakes against members of other
648 tribes with whom they happened to be at the time on sufficiently good terms, or at least not bitterly and actively hostile, to meet and foregather peacefully, such as the Piegan, Flathead, Nez Percé, and Cree. In such intertribal contests they would often go out to win every possession of their opponents.

572 The Gros Ventre distinguished three kinds of friends: ordinary friends,
525 true or pledged friends, and enemy or war friends. As a rule ordinary close friends would not take opposite sides in a big gambling game. This was all the more true of pledged friends. Two boys, for instance, who liked each other
[608] and who had perhaps grown up together would, though belonging to different bands, enter into a sort of "sworn brotherhood," give each other presents, exchange intimate confidences, and promise, without religious rite of any kind, to stand by each other always, even to death if necessary. Two girls could also enter into a similar pact. Such "true" or pledged friends never gambled against each other either as players or as backers, at least never for stakes of value.

Of enemy or war friends we have previously spoken when describing the wheel game. Two enemy friends would gamble against each other for small stakes or big, the bigger the better. In fact a hand game for big stakes between